

Our Horse Danny

Condensed from the Oral History of LaDrue Dorton

Grandfather's horse was a light in color gray mustang gelding. He stood about five feet high at the withers (I'm sure that horsemen could tell how many hands he was but I don't know about that) and weighed about eight or nine hundred pounds.

His name was Danny, although my Grandmother always called him Dicky, but I don't know why. She had a canary named Dicky.

Grandfather told me that he had purchased Danny from a horse trapper named Nels Otterson, who had captured Danny in Rush Valley, which was two valleys west of Utah Valley where we lived, a distance of about thirty miles.

At the time of his capture, Danny was a Stallion and the leader of a band of wild horses. Mr. Otterson had made several attempts to capture Danny and was finally able to do so by shooting him through the neck, a common practice called "roaching."

After Mr. Otterson had converted him to a gelding and broken him to ride and to tolerate a bridle and harness, he was sold to my Grandfather who used him to pull a delivery wagon. He would deliver meat to a meat market on the weekend.

He was about ten years old and very gentle when I first met him. I think I was four or five years old when I had my first ride on Danny.

It was in the spring of the year and Grandfather was using Danny to plow the garden. I was following along and I suppose that I was somewhat in the way when they would reach the end of the furrow and needed to turn around, because Grandfather, after telling me to stand clear several times, picked me up and put me on Danny's back.

I guess I was frightened and afraid I would fall off, but Grandfather told me to hang onto the hames, (two curved projections which are attached to the collar of a draft horse and to which the traces are fastened), and I would be alright. And if I did fall off it would be on soft ground and would be less painful than being stepped on by the horse.

My early associations with Danny were when I would accompany my Grandfather as we made trips to the farm in the wagon. My Grandfather owned a

farm up at the corner of 5th West and 9th North. My father eventually built a house on the north west corner of it with the rest of it being used as a pasture and a farm down below the irrigation canal. The land now is a housing development. I used to grow cucumbers there when I was in high school and I remember the 4H club... things change.

Sometimes I would be allowed to hold the reins and make believe that I was a teamster. When I was about seven or eight years old, I was allowed to ride him in the barnyard and we became very good friends, mostly because it was one of my jobs to fill his nose bag with oats.

When I was nine or ten years old I was allowed to drive the wagon to the farm when he was needed by the hired man for some reason. Up at the farm my Grandfather had a lot of chicken coops...four or five. He had a couple of thousand laying hens there and he hired a man, with the last name of Darling. I don't know what his first name was, but they called him Bouts. That's all I ever knew him by.

He lived up there in a room at the end of the granary that had been converted into a living space...kind of a lean to I guess, at the side of the granary. So that's who the hired man was.

I was also allowed to ride him to the farm when we did not need him at home as there was a pasture there and he was able to feed on grass. When this happened I would walk home, a distance of about one mile. And when he was needed at home I would walk to the farm and ride him home.

When I walked, my usual route to and from the farm was to go north on Second West Street to Sixth North Street and then go west until I came to the irrigation canal that ran through the farm and take a 'short cut,' up the canal bank until I came to the pasture, thus saving a distance of about three city blocks. When I was riding or driving Danny, I had to take a longer route using the city streets.

In the fall of the year, after the crops grown on the cultivated part of the farm had been harvested, Danny was pastured there to allow him to glean whatever was left over. Some times it was sugar beet tops and some times it was barley or oats along the fence lines and ditch banks, but whatever it was, Danny seemed to like the change of diet. He usually stayed in this field for a month or two, depending on when the severe weather arrived, but spent the winter under cover at the home lot.

When Danny was in the grass pasture he could see me coming up the canal bank and he would usually come to meet me at the corner nearest the canal. I

suppose that it was because he knew that we would be going home where he could expect a nose bag of oats, which he dearly loved. When he was in the cultivated field, it was—dare I say it!!!—a horse of a different color. When he saw me coming he would do one of two things. If he wanted to go home he would meet me at the corner of the field nearest the canal. If he didn't want to go home he would go the center of the field and dare me to catch him.

Since I rode him bareback and only used the halter rope to guide him, I didn't have much to help me catch him. When I would approach him to try to get the rope around his neck, he would turn his hind quarters toward me and if I tried to get close to his neck, he would turn again to keep me away. If I tried to dart around him, he would trot off a short distance and wait for me to try again.

After a few minutes of this drill, I would usually become frustrated and whack him on the hind-quarters with the halter rope and he would trot off thirty or forty feet and turn and look at me and paw the ground with a front foot. Sometimes I would get so frustrated that I would just sit down on the ground and cry and try to think of some way to get the rope on him.

I tried to get him to run by throwing clods of earth at him, but he would only turn his hind quarters toward me and move out of my range. If I ran toward him, he would run. When I stopped, he would stop. I believe he thought we were playing some kind of game. I think this was when I first realized, that he was probably smarter than I was. When he was tired of the game, sometimes after an hour or so, he would go stand by the gate and I would get the rope on him and we would go home.

Danny had four speeds, or gaits, as I think they were called when referring to horses. They were: walk, trot, gallop and run. When he was hitched to the wagon or buggy, he used the first two and when I was riding him, he would use the first three, although it took a little urging to get him to gallop. Since I rode him "bare-back," it was mostly walk and gallop because trotting was very uncomfortable. I only saw him run on two occasions and both times I was riding him, although I had been told he once ran away with the buggy when my Grandmother was driving to Cedar Fort when she was visiting as the Lehi Stake Primary Superintendent.

Although Danny only ran away with me twice, he unloaded me on several occasions when he became startled by something he didn't expect. The first time he ran away with me was on a duck hunting trip to the Jordan River, which was about

three or four miles west of Lehi. Elmo Hardy, a neighborhood friend, who was about a year older than me, I think he was twelve years old, had received a twelve gauge shotgun for Christmas and he had been coaxing me to go hunting with him.

I told him that we didn't have a gun, except for a single shot twenty-two caliber rifle that Grandfather used to shoot rats when he would see them around the granary, and that it was too far to walk to the river. He suggested that maybe Grandfather would let us ride Danny. I finally told him that I would ask, thinking that would be an easy way out; since I didn't want him to think I was afraid of guns.

Much to my surprise, Grandfather said yes, but he reminded us that Danny was very upset when he heard loud noises, such as firecrackers or gunshots and that was why he always took him to the farm over the Fourth and Twenty-fourth of July holidays. He said that if we didn't tie Danny to a stout tree before the shooting started, we would be walking home. After waiting a day or two for the weather to moderate, we mounted up on Danny early in the afternoon and departed for the river. Danny seemed a little nervous and it took a little coaxing to get him to go.

I didn't know if it was the guns or because we were riding double. After we got out on the road to the river, the trip was uneventful until we got close to the river where we could see a few flights of ducks. At about this time, Elmo started opening and closing the breech of his shotgun and Danny started to become a little skittish.

I told Elmo not to load the gun until we got Danny tied up. He said that he had not loaded the gun, a statement that turned out to be false. As we neared the river, I spotted a tree that looked stout enough to hold Danny if he should bolt when we fired the guns.

As we neared the tree, a flight of ducks flew over and Elmo fired at them. Needless to say, Danny departed the scene as Elmo and I picked ourselves up off the ground. Danny started running toward the river, but when he came to the steel bridge, he turned around and ran back toward home. I made a feeble effort to stop him as he ran past us, but I guess he had 'had' it with us. After he had run two or three hundred yards down the road toward home, he fell.

I think he must have stepped on the halter rope and tripped himself. After a few minutes, it seemed like an eternity to me as I was praying that he hadn't broken a leg, he struggled to his feet and continued down the road toward home. He was

trotting as he disappeared from sight. I guess he had learned about running with a rope dragging on the ground.

After Elmo and I dusted ourselves off and located our guns, he wanted to continue the duck hunt. I asked him if he knew the way home. He said that he did and I told him “to have fun,” and I started the long walk home, as I wanted to get home before dark. Elmo caught up with me shortly before I got home. He did not have any ducks.

Danny was in the shed where he was quartered when I arrived. He was quietly munching hay and I could not see any apparent damage, so I got the curry comb and spent a little time grooming him. I also told him that I was sorry and hoped that we could still be friends.

When I went into the house, and Grandfather asked me if we had any luck with the ducks. I replied, “Not much,” and he smiled knowingly at me. I am sure he knew what had happened, but at least, he didn’t say, “I told you so.”

The second time Danny ran away with me was on a trip to Saratoga Springs Resort, which was about seven miles southwest of Lehi, and was located on the western shore of Utah Lake.

Saratoga Springs was primarily a swimming resort, but also had a baseball field, boating docks, a large covered pavilion, or bowery, with picnic tables and a large grass area leading down to the lake shore. There were two large pools, one indoor and one outdoor, filled by water from hot springs. The resort usually opened for business a week or two before Memorial Day, or Decoration Day, as it was known as in those days, and closed soon after school began in September.

One warm sunny day in late April or early May, my best friend, Dave Curtis, and I were suffering from the effects of spring fever and we thought how nice it would be to go swimming. It was a little too chilly for our usual swimming hole and we decided to go to Saratoga and take a dip in the warm water. We knew that the resort wasn’t open, but we also knew that some of our friends had been “sneaking in,” from time to time. Being about twelve years old we didn’t think much about the consequences if we were caught, and anyway, it would give us something to brag about.

I asked Grandfather if we could borrow Danny for a ride down to the river. He gave us permission and suggested that we use a bridle and borrow a saddle from my Uncle Abe Anderson, since we would be riding double, and it would be

more comfortable for all concerned.

It took us about an hour and a half to reach the resort. The gate at the entrance was locked so we tied Danny to a tree and climbed over the gate and walked to the out-door pool and went for our swim. When we were finished we walked back to where we had left Danny and started for home.

Danny was always glad to be going toward home and he walked briskly and trotted some until I would rein him in. The trotting didn't bother me, since I could stand up in the stirrups, but it was hard for Dave to hang on so we mostly walked or galloped.

There was a wooden bridge across the Jordan River, about a mile from the resort entrance, near the pumping plant that moved water from Utah Lake down the river to be used for irrigation. When we had crossed this bridge on our way to the resort, Danny didn't seem to be bothered by sound made by his hoofs. Maybe because he was walking, or by the barking dog that was near a house at the pumping plant, so we had no idea that it would any different on the way home.

As we neared the bridge, Danny began to trot, and when we started to cross, his hoof-beats made kind of a hollow sound and he got a little nervous and started to trot faster and jump around a bit, even though I tried to rein him in.

As we got to the far end of the bridge, the dog that we had seen earlier jumped out of some vegetation, started barking, and bit Danny on the ankle. Danny kicked at the dog, the dog let out a yelp so I guess he got him, and bolted for home. Dave fell off on the first jump but I managed to stay aboard, I suppose because I was in the saddle. Danny ran as fast as he could for a few hundred yards, perhaps a quarter of a mile, before I could get him under control.

When I finally got him stopped, we turned around and started back to pick up Dave. It took some urging, as Danny didn't want to go any direction away from home. I was worried that Dave may have been injured when he fell from the horse, but when we got within a couple of hundred yards of the bridge, we met him walking rapidly toward us.

When I asked him if was okay, he replied, "I was frightened more than hurt because when I fell, I landed on the dog and it broke my fall." He wasn't sure who was more frightened, he or the dog, because when they got untangled, the dog yelped and took off for the house with his tail between his legs. After Dave got mounted up, the remainder of our trip home was uneventful, since Danny was

headed for home and didn't need much urging. As an afterthought, it seems to me that wherever we went, Danny always knew the way home. He knew the way home from the farm and would always turn and go up the alley that ran between the buildings on Main Street and the "old lot," and stop at the gate to the barnyard.